

The Downfall of Don José

A cautionary tale of the consequences of catastrophic choices

Once upon a time in the sunny country of Spain lived a young soldier called Don José. Don José's job was to guard an orange factory in the city of Seville. Now this was no ordinary factory, it was famous all over the world for its magnificent marmalade, juicy orange lollies, biscuits and best of all, its jaffa cakes. But one year there was a huge drought in the country and oranges became scarce. People still wanted their marmalade and biscuits and unscrupulous thieves and smugglers started breaking into the factory. It was Don José's job to guard the factory and stop these very naughty smugglers. He was good at his job and took his work very seriously. That was until he met a wild beautiful Romany called Carmen.

Carmen worked in the factory, but she also told people's fortunes and unbeknown to Don José did a little bit of smuggling on the side. She lived life on the edge of right and wrong. But she was very beguiling and incredibly beautiful and took advantage of this to get out of scrapes.

One day José was guarding his position outside the factory when suddenly standing in front of him was this beautiful girl. He could not take his eyes off her and when she took a flower from her hair and threw it at him, he was enchanted and fell under her spell.

Suddenly, a huge commotion broke out in the factory. Don José came to his senses and ran in to see what was going on. Inside the factory, he found Carmen fighting with one of the other workers called Eunicita. (*Pronounced You-ni-theet-a*).

Eunicita was renowned in the factory for making the best marmalade and when she found a jealous Carmen tipping salt into her marmalade to make it taste disgusting, she flew into a rage and chased Carmen around the factory with her big wooden spoon. José found Carmen laughing and throwing the sticky marmalade at poor Eunicita, making the most awful mess. Don José stepped between the two fighting girls and broke up the fight. He decided that the best thing to do was to take the naughty Carmen off to prison immediately so that she could cool off.

But Carmen had other ideas. She cajoled and flattered and charmed Don José, who you remember was under her spell. She promised to meet him at a new restaurant in town, where they would have a romantic candlelit supper together. Don José, who was usually so good at doing the right thing, was weakened by his feelings of love and passion towards Carmen and he made an unbelievably bad choice.

He let Carmen escape.

When this was discovered by his captain, Don José was found guilty of disobeying orders and was thrown into the cell that should have been for Carmen.

In the meantime, the new “El Bulli” restaurant in town was creating quite a stir. It was run by the world-famous chef, Escamillo, who was known as the “Sharpest Chef in Seville”. People came from miles around to sample his Spanish Tapas - Sizzling Steaks, Spicy chorizo and the best *Gambas al Pil Pil* in the country. Everyone was in awe of Escamillo, and Carmen was determined to get to know him better.

When she heard that Don José was about to be released from prison, she suggested that they meet at El Bullis, where she could flirt with Escamillo and sweet talk Don José at the same time - being the centre of attention – just as she liked it. As soon as José was released, he ran quickly to the restaurant where he was reunited with Carmen.

In the restaurant, Carmen danced a flamboyant dance and sang a hypnotic song. Don José was enchanted all over again. Just as they were about to dance together, a bugle call was heard all over the city. This was the order to go back to barracks.

Don José jumped back, suddenly announcing “Sorry darling Carmen, I must go back to my barracks. I am still a soldier, and I must obey orders”.

Well. Carmen could not believe her ears. How dare he stand her up for a silly little bugle call? She was furious with him and told him to go away and never come back. José could not bear it and blurted out how much he loved her and would do anything for her.

Carmen saw this as a wonderful opportunity. She was so bored working in the factory and had decided to move up to the mountains and make a living by being a smuggler. Not a particularly good plan, but Carmen did not care. She wanted excitement in her life.

Once again, sensing Don José’s weakness, she suggested he go and live with her in the mountains, be a smuggler and give up his army life. Instead of thinking of the consequences he threw his arms around her and said “yes!” He would leave with her. Oh, Don José, what a terrible decision – you have thrown away your fine upstanding way of life to run away and become a thief and a smuggler.

José and Carmen ran off into the mountains with lots of stolen orange goodies from the factory to smuggle across the border and sell in France. For a few weeks, José was blissfully happy with Carmen but he soon started to feel guilty about what he had done. To make matters worse Carmen was becoming more and more unpredictable and more demanding. She was getting bored with her new life and her new boyfriend. She wanted something different.. maybe a sizzling hot chef?

One night as José was watching over the smugglers camp, he saw a man climbing up the mountainside. It was Escamillo - and when José found out he had come to see Carmen he became so jealous that he started a huge orange fight with the famous chef. Escamillo thought it was all a huge joke, but Don José was boiling with rage. He didn’t want to lose Carmen. After all, he’d sacrificed so much for her.

But Carmen didn't care. She'd had enough of mountain life and Escamillo was very famous and very handsome. He'd make an excellent new boyfriend. Don José watched the two of them leave together, arm in arm. He was eaten up with jealousy and vowed that whatever it took, he would make Carmen come back to him.

Over the next few weeks, Don José's jealousy grew and grew. He knew that Escamillo and Carmen were living happily, now the hottest couple in town, and were making headlines wherever they went. Escamillo's new restaurant was a tremendous success and a national competition to find Seville's Sharpest Chef of the Year was being held at El Bulli's. Escamillo was the hot favourite to retain his title.

On the day of the competition, the whole of Seville come out to watch all the best chefs in Spain compete. Don José hid in the back of the storeroom, and waited and waited until Carmen came in, to change into a pair of new high-heeled shoes that Escamillo had bought to go with her beautiful dress.

As Carmen took the shoes out of their box, Don José emerged from the shadows and confronted Carmen. He begged her to run away with him. He reminded her of all the things he had done for her to keep her out of trouble, but Carmen was unmoved. She had no feelings left for Don José. She liked being the famous girlfriend of Escamillo's. She did not want to be trapped in a guilty relationship with this angry man.

This made Don José furious. He grabbed her and held her tightly in his arms, hoping that she would fall back in love with him. Carmen pulled away from him, tripped over a box of oranges, and fell onto the floor.

Don José bent to help her up, but Carmen did not move. She had fallen onto the sharp heel of her new shoe that had pierced her chest and punctured her heart.

She was dead.

Don José was horrified. His terrible decisions had cost him everything. His beautiful Carmen had paid with her life, and he was to blame for this tragedy. He would never forgive himself. In the distance he could hear the cheers of the crowd as Escamillo was crowned once again the Sharpest Chef in Seville.

But Don José's future was to languish forever in a dark prison cell, regretting the terrible decisions he had made that had caused the death of his one true love.

Top Facts About Bizet

He was a child prodigy

Georges Bizet was born in Paris on 25 October 1838. His father was a singing teacher and his mother was an accomplished pianist who gave Georges his first lessons. The Paris Conservatoire was so impressed by little Georges' abilities that it waived its age rule and offered him a place when he was nine.

He became famous after his death

Bizet died of a heart attack aged 36, on the 3rd June, 1875, just three months after the première of Carmen. He died unaware that his opera would become a spectacular and enduring success. His other works also began to be performed more frequently in the 20th century and he is now recognised as a composer of brilliance and originality.

The arrival of 'Carmen'

Bizet wrote Carmen the year he was to die. It was his masterpiece.

The production of Bizet's final opera, 'Carmen', was delayed because of fears that its themes of betrayal and murder would offend. In the audience at the opera's premiere were Massenet and Saint-Saëns who loved it. Gounod accused Bizet of plagiarism and much of the press comment was negative. Bizet was convinced that the opera was a failure. Many think that this belief contributed to his early death, though Bizet was also a very heavy smoker!



Bizet as a young man

Projects:

History

What was going on in the world during Bizet's life time?

Imagine you're a friend of Georges Bizet and you're sitting together in the park talking about the world around you.

Project 1 - Headline news

Find out about 4 newsworthy events. Write a newspaper front page writing a factual story of what's happening. Can you make it sensational? What's your headline? Don't forget to include pictures – you might find old photographs online. If not, use your imagination and draw a picture.

Famous People who lived at the same time as Bizet

Hans Christian Anderson (1805-1874)

Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

David Livingstone (1813-1873)

Florence Nightingale (1820 – 1910)

Claude Monet (1840 – 1926)

Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901)

Harriet Tubman (1822 – 1913)

Charles Babbage (1791 – 1871)

Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882)

George Stephenson (1781 – 1848)

Abraham Lincoln (1809 - 1865)

Thomas Edison (1847 – 1931)

Project 2 - build a historical timeline

Draw a timeline of things that *you think are important* that happened during Bizet's life.

- What buildings were being built
- What art was being created?
- Which books/plays were being written?
- Which wars were going on?
- Which countries were the superpowers?
- Which people were powerful and influential?
- What were people wearing?

Science

This period in history was a period of great scientific break through and invention.

Project 1 - Invention Olympics

What do you think are the best three inventions during 1838-1875?

Who invented them? What did they do? What impact has it had on our lives? What would our lives be like without it?

Award your three choices the Gold, Silver and Bronze medals.

Project 2 - What's your big idea?

Do you have any ideas for good inventions?

Can you:

- Draw a diagram of your invention? Label at the diagram accurately
- Explain what it does?
- Who will benefit from it?

Arts and Craft

Project 1 - Create a backdrop for the DownFall of Don José

The backdrop you have been given is the cityscape of Seville. It will be used in the opening act of the opera production of 'The Downfall of Don José' to set the scene for the characters.

You can paint this however you like but we would suggest keeping yourself limited to **red, orange, black** and **yellow** paint. Using this colour scheme will make sure the backdrop fits with the rest of the set and gives the impression of the hot and dusty city of Seville. If there are any parts you want to highlight you may want to do that with small strokes of **blue** or **white**.

The cityscape is full of windows and arches so think carefully about how you colour these so they stand out and have maximum impact. Things have to be big and bold so that an audience can see them.

You might want to give the canvas a quick iron before working on it if you have time, this will make it easier to paint. Feel free to stick on coloured fabrics or paper to add to your design, still try to stay in the red, orange, yellow or black colour scheme though

Once your backdrop is finished and dried you might want to trim the frayed edges or any untidy bits with sharp scissors if you have time.

Project 2 - Discovering Fans

What is the history of the fan? (<https://www.thefanmuseum.org.uk/>)

The first European folding fans were inspired by and copied from prototypes brought in to Europe by merchant traders and the religious orders who had set up colonies along the coasts of China and even Japan. These early fans were reserved for Royalty and the nobility and, as expensive toys, they were regarded as a status symbol.

While their **montures** (i.e. sticks and guards) were made from materials such as ivory, mother of pearl and tortoiseshell, often carved and pierced and ornamented with silver, gold and precious stones, the leaves were well painted by craftsmen who gradually amalgamated into guilds such as The Worshipful Company of Fan Makers.

Fans in the 19th Century

Arguably, the most lavish fans date from the second half of the nineteenth century. The artists who painted these fans were often fashionable painters who signed their work – as did the tabletiers who carved the magnificent sets of sticks and guards (montures). Great maisons sprang up in Paris, which had become the epicentre for the manufacture of fine quality fans. These maisons would become bywords for the creation and distribution of objets de luxe, furnishing royalty and the upper echelons of polite society with fans of particular quality.

Spanish fans were actually used as a flirting communication device where women would turn and hold the fans in certain angles to express rejection or acceptance towards their male counterparts.

Making a foldable fan:

Work sheet enclosed. Great blog on this. <https://gluesticksblog.com/diy-pocket-fans/>

English

Write a cautionary tale of your own.

What is a Cautionary Tale? Research other cautionary tales.

Write your own cautionary tale.

- What is the thing that the main character is warned against doing?
- Why does the main character continue to do this forbidden thing.
- How do they keep it a secret – or do they?
- What happens as a consequence of this bad habit?
- How does it affect the character and how does it affect others?

Geography

Five fun facts about Seville

Where is Seville?

What is the surrounding countryside like?

What do you think the weather is there?

What do the people do there? What do they wear? What work do they do?

Music

Learning the Children's Chorus from Act I of Bizet

In act I of the opera, there is a chorus written for the street urchins to sing whilst they poke fun at the sentries who are guarding the factory (one of whom is Don José).

Your pupils will be singing this chorus as part of the performance and we will be rehearsing this when we come to see you. We will be sending you a practise track. If you have time to listen and try and learn the lyrics, this would be excellent, as we can then choreograph the moves that we want them to do. Don't worry if you don't have time. We can teach them part of this on the day as well.

Words are enclosed on a separate sheet.

Foldable fan worksheet.

(<https://gluesticksblog.com/diy-pocket-fans>)

You will need:

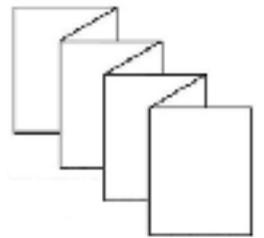
- 3 sheets of A4 paper - any colour (photocopying paper is idea.)
- Crayons
- 2 lollipop sticks
- a rubber band

Step 1

Decorate the 3 sheets of paper any way you want with the crayons. They can match or they can be completely different. It's up to you, but it should be just with crayons and not paint, or anything that will peel or crack. (You can always use recycle old pictures from your wall displays.)

Step 2

Accordion-fold the pieces of paper, folding the short edge over itself. The folds should be roughly the same width as the lolly stick.)



Step 3

Fold the accordions in half.

Step 4

Glue the short edges of the accordions together to make one semi circle of pleated paper



Step 5

Glue the two remaining edges to the lolly sticks and fasten with an elastic band. And this is your fan.

